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FOR DS/IP, DS/TIA, NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, NEA/EX, CA/OCS/ACS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/27/2028
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CASC](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: DAMASCUS EAC REVIEWS SECURITY ENVIRONMENT
FOLLOWING ALLEGED U.S. STRIKE

REF: DAMASCUS 741

Classified By: Charge Maura Connelly for reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S/NF) The Damascus Emergency Action Committee (EAC) met October 27 to review Post's security profile amid Syrian media allegations of an October 26 U.S. military strike on Syrian territory. Charge chaired the meeting; A/DCM, RSO, POL/ECON, PAO, A/MGT (IMO), DAO, GRPO, CONS, and MSGDETCMDR attended.

12. (C) Charge reviewed her MFA meeting late on October 26 (reftel), during which V/FM Miqdad reiterated allegations made in various Syrian media outlets. According to Miqdad, four U.S. military helicopters conducted an offensive operation October 26 at Sukkariah Farm near the eastern Syrian border town of Abu Kamal, killing eight Syrian civilians. A/PAO noted that Syrian news headlines concerning the incident had been particularly shrill, with reference to "acts of aggression," "war crimes," and "U.S. terrorism," while television footage showed bloodied corpses and interviews with injured victims. Thus far, however, there have been no calls for reprisal or revenge. Syrian officials and spokesmen have publicly blamed the U.S., indicated that the U.S. would bear responsibility for any future repercussions, and that the Syrian Government would respond in unspecified ways. BBC reported remarks by Hamas officials condemning the attack and expressing solidarity with the SARG.

13. (C) RSO reported that FSNI met early October 27 with the General in charge of the Damascus Emergency Police, who stated that he was unaware of any planned demonstration against the Embassy or any other U.S.-affiliated facilities in Syria. EAC members observed that while the SARG had used carefully stage-managed, well organized street demonstrations as a political tool in the past, they had become a less frequently-used tactic after the February 2006 "Mohamed cartoons" demonstration had spiraled out of the SARG's control and resulted in significant damage to four western embassies. Following a successful, well-managed anti-Israel rally in March 2008, however, the SARG had apparently grown more confident in its ability to manage demonstrations and may choose to stage an anti-USG rally either near our facilities or at another location in Damascus. EAC members also noted the potential for spontaneous, non-SARG organized protests similar to the 1998 riot which caused significant damage to the Embassy and CMR after a military operation against Saddam Hussein's regime.

14. (C) EAC members agreed that the most immediate threat arising from the present situation was that of demonstrations directed against USG facilities. EAC members also noted that the ongoing threat of terrorist activity against the Embassy

may be intensified. Anti-U.S. rhetoric may energize individuals inspired by a variety of motives to exact revenge against the USG, with or without the SARG's knowledge and/or support. The possibility of spontaneous acts of anti-American violence away from official settings, while not historically commonplace, was also raised as a potential threat. While not viewed as direct security threats, EAC also assessed the SARG's promised "response" to the alleged U.S. strike, which may also include harassment of embassy operations (e.g., further delaying staff visa issuances), including the possibility of enforced departure of selected Embassy personnel.

¶5. (C) EAC members agreed that even in the absence of any specific or credible indication of impending demonstrations or acts of anti-American violence in Syria, reasonable prudence dictated that the following preventive measures be undertaken:

--All personnel will minimize the extent to which they unnecessarily call attention to their USG affiliation in public settings; re-focus on varying routes and times to avoid patterns of predictability in their daily commutes; and remain contactable via cell phone after hours;

--Section Chiefs will ensure that sensitive and classified holdings remain at minimum necessary storage levels;

--In accordance with the No Double Standard policy, the

Consular Section will draft a warden message in coordination with CA to remind the American community to avoid demonstrations and large gathering and to remain in contact with the Embassy for further information as the situation develops.

¶6. (C) EAC reviewed response options based on the following civil disorder tripwires:

Tripwire One: Escalation of anti-U.S. rhetoric in the Syrian media which creates a fertile climate for protests and/or acts of violence against U.S. institutions:

--Demarche the MFA at the highest possible level to urge a de-escalation of the rhetoric and to remind the SARG of its obligations to protect USG facilities in Syria;

--Cancel representational functions (including the popular weekly PD movie night and the November 4 elections event), especially those designed to attract significant numbers of Syrian youth;

--Temporarily close certain public functions, including visa services, the PD Information Resources Center, and the PD-affiliated American Language Center (located next to the Chancery).

Tripwire Two: Post receives indication of an upcoming demonstration within the next several hours or overnight (whether by notification by security contacts, media reports, broadcast SMS messages by organizers, or a significant change in the deployment of SARG security forces around Mission facilities):

--Undertake the measures described above, and:

--Adopt the pre-designated "Critical Staffing" matrix to ensure minimal presence of personnel at Mission facilities;

--Relocate the majority of USG vehicles from the Chancery to a designated shelter location, most likely a local hotel with secure off-street parking and standing agreement to host Mission vehicles if required;

--If continuing Critical Staffing activities at the Chancery Compound, suspend operations at the PD Annex, with PD

Critical Staff operating from the Chancery;

--If notification is received overnight, consider running operations from the Alternate Command Center (DCMR), with designated internal defense and communications personnel establishing 24-hour, shift-based operations at the Chancery;

--Apprise the Mission community of developments in the situation via the Cascade System (telephone tree), RSO SMS broadcasts, and/or the hand-held radio network;

--Keep the American community advised of the (un)availability of consular services via warden messages;

Tripwire Three: Post receives indication of an imminent or underway demonstration en route to the Embassy:

--Activate Internal Defense Plan and seek immediate SARG assistance in maintaining a security cordon around Mission facilities;

--Dismiss non-Critical Staffing personnel if the situation permits the safe departure of personnel (if the situation permits, consolidate any Critical Staff personnel from the PD Annex to the Chancery compound);

--Relocate the majority of USG vehicles from the Chancery to a designated shelter location, most likely a local hotel with secure off-street parking and standing agreement to host Mission vehicles if required;

--Apprise the Mission community of developments in the situation via the Cascade System (telephone tree), RSO SMS broadcasts, and/or the hand-held radio network;

--If practical to do so, keep the American community advised of the (un)availability of consular services via warden messages.

CONNELLY